THE BEST SNAKE STORY.

A Yarn About Imagination.

From Macmillan's Magazine.

The beauty of the best snake story in the world is that there was really no snake in it, which is more than can be said even of the Garden of Eden.

It had been very hot that summer on the rancho. Men work in the fields of California with the thermometer at 110 degrees, while they fall down of heat apoplexy in the streets of New York and Chicago at 90 degrees. That is the maxim they preach to the stranger in the West, and it has truth in it, but it is a mistake to suppose that even in California men work in the fields in comfort in such a temperature; and that summer the thermometer had gone very near 115 degrees. So we were grateful enough to get away into the hills for a spell, with a wagon and a tent and the usual outfit of pots and pans, three of us, white men, with Louie, the Mexican (whom we called in the vernacular the Greaser), to mind the horses and make himself generally useful. Our programme was to fish the rivers, shoot deer, and possibly a grizzly bear, discover a gold mine and go back to the rancho with a prospective fortune.

We had just pitched our tent. Down on the plain for weeks before we had been sleeping out on our veranda, but the air of the hills had a nip in it by contrast. It was late in the afternoon, but there was still plenty of sunshine. I followed Louie round a shoulder of the hill, going to fetch water at a little stream tumbling from somewhere among the snowy peaks that capped the zone of fire on the great mountains above us. These mountains had, at some time or other, sent down a little avalanche of small rocks, that lay heaped on our left as we walked. The scene was the most peaceful imaginable.

In an instant a succession of small incidents sent the peace to limbo. Louie dropped his pannikin with a tinkling clatter, crying "Sancta Maria!" in a voice of terror. At the same moment I heard the dread rattle of a snake, and saw its length gleam under Louie's feet and vanish among the rocks.

"Sancta Maria!" he tottered back into my arms, his dark face livid with fear.

"What is it, Louie? Did the snake strike you?"

"In the foot," he said; "yes."

"Let us get back to camp. Quick, lean on me."

"What's the good, boss?" he asked. "I'm a dead man." Nevertheless he came with me, leaning on my shoulder, and making a lame walk of it.

Down in the plain we had no rattlesnakes. For miles about the ranch there was no rocks for them, and though there were plenty of ground-squirrel holes we never saw snakes about them. The thought of such things did not enter our heads, and Louie, weary of his boots, had kicked them off, with the long spurs, and come with me in his stocking feet on this quest for water.

A word explained to the boys what had happened.

"Strychnine's the best," said Jock Peters, who was our authority on the question of snake-bites, which he had studied in Australia; "but we haven't got it: so we must do what we can with this. But it's a poor chance," he added in a whisper, as, to save time, he knocked the neck off a bottle of brandy. "Drink it, Louie," he said; "never mind cutting your lip; get it down—that's the chief thing."

The Mexican's teeth chattered as we forced in the neck of the bottle, but he drank a great gulp without winking. The liquor, or pickle either, to scorch the throat of a Mexican has yet to be found.

Jim Kelly, the Irishman, was saddling the freshest of our horses, to ride at best speed into Lindsay, 11 miles away in the haze of the plains, for the doctor. In a minute he was pounding away along the hills. "Fix up a light as high as you can put it if it's dark before we get back," he shouted as he went.

We pulled the sock off the Mexican's foot. Already it was swelling fast, with a purplish tinge round a tiny blue spot, from which the smallest imaginable drop of blood had welled.

"Any good cauterizing it?" I suggested.

"Not a mag," Jock said shortly. "Go on with the brandy and keep him moving; that's his only chance."

The Mexican's face was dreadful to see; he called, in his terror, on every saint in the Church; but he declared he suffered no pain. Jock, improving the occasion, began relating in a low voice to me anecdotes of all the snake-bites he had known. "One boy I've seen that did recover," he said; and that was from the bite of a brown snake, and a brown snake's as bad, they say, as a rattler—an Australian brown snake, that is; a rattler can't be worse. But this boy was stupid all his life after; not as quick-witted as the average, which is not much to say. And at times, just at the time of year at which he'd been bitten, the wound got red again and swelled, and he was stupider than ever. Louie had on a sock; the rattler'd have had to go through that; he might have spent a bit of his poison there; that gives Louie a sort of a chance. Does it hurt you, now, Louie?"

"No, boss; no, not hurt."

The swelling was spreading; going up the ankle and right up the leg, and the man began to talk slowly and painfully.

"I remember," said Jock, "going along a ridge of a terrace on a steep river bank. The river was full of sharks, and I met a brown snake coming along the ridge towards me. There wasn't room to turn, and I couldn't take to the river, for the sharks, and I hadn't a gun. But my pal coming behind had a gun, and he poked the barrel in between my legs and blew the brute to bits."

"Is that true, Jock?" I asked.

"My heaven, d'you think I'd lie at such a time as this?" with a glance at Louie's face.

"Are you getting sleepy, man?" he said; then, as Louie did not answer, he took him under the arm. Signaling me to do the same on the other side, we kept him moving between us up and down and round the tent. From time to time we made him drink more brandy. He had taken half a bottle, but it seemed to have no effect on him.

"It stimulates the heart's action, you know," Jock explained, "just as the poison goes to stop it; but strychnine's the best, acts as nerve tonic. It's a deal to do with the nerves, this snake-bite business."

We heard the little ground-owls begin whistling to each other from the mouths of the squirrel holes away down in the plain, and the bats and moths began to come out as the sun sank out of sight. They brushed our faces as we continued to march the Mexican to and fro. Presently I left the work to Jock, and rigged up a pine torch for a signal light on the pole which I took from the wagon. The job took some while, but at length I got the light fairly flaring.

"Look at his face," Jock whispered to me as I came back to him.

It was a shocking sight under the flickering rays, swollen, distorted, livid. The man's arm was swollen, too, as I felt when I took my place to support him. His movements were lethargic and heavy, so that I wondered that Jock, unaided, could have kept him moving so long.

"Give him more brandy," Jock directed, "more; that's it—he's had nearly all the bottle. There's a chance," he went on presently; "I really believe there is. I thought he'd have been dead before now. Maybe he don't mean dying after all. A white man'd have been dead half an hour ago."

"I wish the doctor'd come."

"Mighty little good wishing."

The weary tramp went on. Twice I had to replenish the beacon-torch, and once more we gave the Mexican a gulp of the brandy, which finished the bottle. As I was fixing the torch for the third time, I heard a shout down the canyon. I answered with all my might, and in a few minutes Jim Kelly and the doctor rode into the circle of the flaring light.

"Alive?" the doctor asked.

"Alive, yes," said Jock: "alive, and that's about all. He can't speak."

"What have you given him—brandy? That's right. How much?"

"A bottleful."

"Right and you've kept him awake? That's it. He won't die now. Wonderful fellows, these Greasers. He'd have died before this if he meant dying. Let's see the wound."

The candle burned as quietly in the still air as in a room. The Mexican's foot was swollen so that it scarcely looked like a human member; but in the midst of the purple swelling was a white circle with the little blue mark, plainly evident, for its center. The Mexican seemed to feel no pain, even when the doctor handled the wound and pressed it upward with his fingers.

"Hold the candle close," he said. "It's blamed strange," he added, "blamed strange," pecking at the little blue mark with his forceps; "the fang's in the wound yet. I never heard of that happening before. Shake him a bit; don't let him go drowsy."

His swollen limb wobbled like jelly under the treatment. It was horrid.

The doctor gave a little dig, and then a little tug with his forceps. Presently he held up to the candle, in the clutch of his forceps, a long white spine, and regarded it curiously.

Then he said in a hollow voice: "Do you know what it is? It's not a fang at all, it's a cactus spike."

"What?"

A strangely perplexed little group of men gazed into each other's faces with questioning eyes, under the stars that twinkled out over the snow-topped edges of the Sierras.

"Only a thorn!"

"Look at it," the doctor said. "You can see the thing for yourselves."

One after the other we examined the spine, feeling its point with a finger that we certainly should not have ventured near it had it been a poison fang. "And there's nothing else in the wound?" Jock asked.

"Not a thing else."

"And you mean to tell me that I've wasted two hours of my time, to say nothing of a bottle of our best brandy, in walking about a Greaser that has nothing the matter but a thorn in his foot? Well, I am darned."

"That's about what you've been doing," the doctor said quietly.

"Well, I am darned." Jock turned with a look of righteous wrath to the wretched Mexican, who was lying in a comatose heap in my arm; but the first sight of his face checked the words unspoken.

"Shake him up; keep him walking," the doctor cried.

"But you don't mean to tell me," Jock began again, when he had succeeded in arousing some sign of life in Louie, "that all that," pointing at his distended features, "is the cactus-thorn?"

"There's not a mite else in the wound."

"Well, I am darned."

"All the same," the doctor added quietly, "he'd have died if you hadn't kept him going."

"Died! What of?"

"Snake-bite—shake him up there; don't let him go drowsy."

"Snake-bite! Heavens and earth, I thought you said there was nothing in his foot beyond the thorn."

Then the doctor went up to Jock and laid a hand on each of his shoulders, and said, very slowly and distinctly: "You mark me, Jock Peters, we're in face of a bigger thing to-night than snake-bite. We're in face of one of the biggest and ultimatest facts of human nature, and one of its biggest mysteries—the influence of the mind upon the body. I've heard of something like this case before, although I've never seen it, nor ever thought I should; and that in connection with a coolie and a cobra in India. In that case, too, there was no snake-bite, although there was a snake. The coolie saw the snake; it darted from beneath his feet, and at the moment (likely from the start he gave) a thorn pierced his feet—just as it happened to the Greaser. And that man, too, the same as this man here, swelled up, showed all the symptoms of snake-poisoning, and died. This man we'll save. You, Jock, have practically saved him, by keeping him moving and counteracting the poison by the brandy. Look at the man; isn't he snake-poisoned?"

"By all that's blue he looks it," Jock admitted.

"And all the hurt he's got—the physical hurt—is just the pin-prick of that thorn. The rest 's all mental—all the swelling, the surcharging of the vessels, mental. Now, tell me, how do you think that man would be but for his morbid mental state, with all that brandy that you've given him?"

"Dead, I suppose."

"You're right—dead; as dead as you or I would be, if we set to drink the same just now. But he—he's hardly drunk; he's sober." And he's better now—heart acting better." He bent and listened to its beating as he spoke. "You've seen a strange thing to-night, gentlemen," he added, rising again, and addressing us collectively; "such a thing as neither you nor I are likely ever to see again. And I'll tell you another thing about it, gentlemen; it's a thing that you won't find you get a deal of credence for when you come to tell it to the boys. There's a fashion in this world for men to believe they know the way things happen; and the thing that happens in a way they don't know they put aside as a thing that didn't happen. So of this," the doctor added simply, "I should only speak, as among gentlemen, with a hand on the pistol-pocket at the hip."

After awhile the awful distortion of Louie's face began to go down. "You can almost see it settling, like a batter pudding," as Jim Kelly said; and the fearful purple tinge died out of it. His heart was beating naturally again, and the doctor said we might let him go to sleep.

In the morning he was difficult to rouse, as he might be after so heavy a night, but the doctor said he would do right enough if we gave him rest for a day or two. And so we did, though his nerve was so shaken that we had to send him back to the plain again where there are no rattlesnakes. It appeared later that Louie had cherished a morbid dread of snakes for a long while, ever since he had had a hand in the killing of one six feet long down in the republic of Mexico; though after a couple of years on the ranch he had almost forgotten that there were such things. A man that is nervous about snakes should never go barefoot in the hills.

"It only shows what I told you," Jock Peters commented. "Strychnine is the thing for snake-bite, because it is such a nerve-tonic. If a man could make believe he had not been bitten he need never die of snake-bite. If ever I'm bitten I shall make believe it was a cactus-spine."

This is a true story, although it's such a good one. If anybody doubts it, he can see the thorn.

Florida's Pocahontas.

Gov. W. B. Bloxham incidentally related the following legend in his address welcoming the delegates of the National Fishery Society to Tampa, Fla., on Thursday, January 20:

"You meet here upon this historic ground, where the footprints of some of Spain's greatest cavaliers and America's noblest captains can be traced. While it is not my intention to recur to their heroic deeds or to offer you a cup filled with the ambrosia of ancient story, yet there is one romance, based upon historic fact, associated with this very spot that I feel you will kindly indulge should brief reference be made thereto.

"Wherever the history of America is read there the story of Pocahontas is known. The romance is most captivating, and some of Virginia's most honored sons trace back a linage to this daughter of the forest. But the historic fact that a similar scene was enacted on this very spot three-quarters of a century before the name of Pocahontas was ever lisped by English lips is unknown to even many Floridians. It was here in 1528, twelve years before De Soto landed on Tampa Bay, that Juan Ortez, a Spanish youth of eighteen, having been captured at Clear Water, was brought before Hirrihugua, the stern Indian chief, in whose breast was rankling a vengeance born of the ill treatment of his mother by the followers of the ill-fated Navarez. Ortez was young and fair, but the cruel chief had given the orders, and here was erected a gridiron of poles, and young Ortez was bound and stretched to meet the demands of a human sacrifice. The torch was being applied, the crackling flames began to gather strength for the human holocaust, when the stern chief's daughter threw herself at her father's feet and interposed in Ortez's behalf. Her beauty rivaled that of the historic dame 'whose heavenly charms kept Troy and Greece ten years in arms.' The soft language of her soul flowed from her never silent eyes as she looked up through her tears of sympathy, imploring the life of the young Spaniard.

"Those tears, the ever-ready weapon of woman's weakness, touched the heart of the savage chief, and Ortez was for the time spared.

"But the demon of evil in a few months again took possession of Hirrihugua, and his daughter saw that even her entreaties would prove unavailing. She was betrothed to Mucoso, the young chief of a neighboring tribe. Their love had been plighted, that God-given love that rules the savage breast.

"Her loving heart told her that Ortez would be safe in Mucoso's keeping. At the dead hour of night she accompanied him beyond danger and placed in his hands such token as Mucoso would recognize.

"She acted none too soon. As the sun rose over this spot, its rays fell upon the maddened chief calling in vain for the intended victim of his vengeance. His rage was such that it dried up the wellsprings of parental affection and he refused the marriage of his daughter unless Ortez was surrendered. But that Indian girl, although it broke the heartstrings of hope, sacrificed her love to humanity, and Mucoso sacrificed his bride upon the altar of honor.

"Ortez lived to welcome De Soto. Tell me—aye tell the world—where a brighter example of nobler virtue was ever recorded! Where in history do you find more genuine and more touching illustration of 'love, charity and forgiveness'—the very trinity of earthly virtues, and the brightest jewels of the Christian heaven?

"What a captivating theme this Florida Pocahontas should present to the pen of imagination, picturing this spot then and to-day associated with romance rich in historic lore."—*Savannah News.*

A $25,000 Office.

This is from the Detroit *Free Press*:

"One may see and hear strange things in the remote localities of this country," said a well-known lawyer who has for some weeks been wandering through the mountainous regions of Pennsylvania. "It never occurred to me especially that there was any part of the great State of Pennsylvania which might be called remote, but after two weeks or more of wandering miles away from railroads and other sights of civilization, I am prepared to say that the Keystone State has its remoteness as well as others not so near the seaboard settlements. Naturally on such a trip I would see things new to me. One oddity was a one-story office building attached to the house of a rich old farmer. As we passed the place the lawyer, who was acting as my guide, called my attention to it.

"'There is something for you to make a note of it,' he said.

"'What is it?' I asked.

"'That little office there in the front yard.'

"'What's noteworthy about it?'

"'It's the most expensive bit of architecture in the country for its size.'

"'What did it cost?'

"'How much would you say?'

"'Oh, about $300.'

"'Well, it just cost $25,350.'

"'Come off,' said I, 'what's the joke?'

"'There isn't any,' he explained, seriously. 'That old chap is the richest man in these parts, and he built that office, which is fireproof, to keep his papers and other valuables in, and into each of the 25,000 brick he put into it he placed a silver dollar while the brick was still soft. That was simply a crank freak of his, but it went, and he built his office of brick at one dollar apiece, not counting the clay and the laying, which added $350 more. Now, if you know of another brick building twenty feet square, unplastered and without modern conveniences, which cost as much, tell me where it is, please.'

"But he had me there, for I am sure I don't know a match for that Pennsylvania office anywhere in the United States."

Some Boyish Answers.

A schoolboy habit of placing upon a question some literal meaning other than intended by the examiner, often leads to answers as curious as unexpected. Thus an inspector asked a lad what were the chief ends of man, and he replied:

"His head and feet."

Another youth, questioned as to where Jacob was going when he was 10 years old, replied that "he was going on for 11."

One specially unimaginative juvenile, called upon to say for what the Red Sea was famous, replied:

"Red herrings!"

But perhaps the most startling answer of this kind was that of the boy who, when asked what was meant by an unclean spirit, responded:

"A dirty devil, sir!"

— Dusty Dolan—Providence is a great blessin', Corney. It takes appertite from the rich, who would give anything to regain it. Coldfeet Corney—Yes, an' gives appertite ter de poor, who would give anything ter git rid uv it, an' can't. Don't tork ter me; I'm chock full uv de emptiness uv dat gift.

Notice of Dissolution.

THE Firm of Moore & Wallis has dissolved partnership, Mr. Wallis retiring. The business will be continued by the undersigned, under the Firm name of MOORE & LUCAS, who ask a continuance of the patronage bestowed on the old Firm. We want your trade, and will do our best to please you in every respect.

B. C. MOORE.
T. T. LUCAS.

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